

by Mike Whitesman

Wycombe Wanderers 2, Maidstone United 3

THERE can be few Wycombe Wanderers supporters who still believe that lightning never strikes twice in the same place after this first Isthmian home defeat of the season. Yet Maidstone wrapped up their unlikely League 'double', not with a sudden decisive flash, but instead with sheer dogged persistence.

United dealt with their Loakes Park hosts in camouflaged stages. They absorbed the early pressure of a team eager to revenge a previous 3-1 defeat; waited while Wanderers, now clearly content to merely win, wrecked themselves; then, on an almost calculated cue, moved unemotionally to the fore, with Wycombe, already dragged down to the depths by desperation, whimpering in pursuit of a draw.

And Wanderers' naively played straight into the hands of a side they should have crucified.

Tactical suicide? An ace that remained up his sleeve until too late? Or just one massive gamble ending in ruins? Whatever manager Barry Darvill's reasons for handing Tony Horseman the number six shirt, Wycombe's attack could not afford to discard the influence of their free scoring stalwart.

Opting far too frequently for a blend of the dainty and the spectacular in front of goal, when the direct approach would have sufficed, Vince Faulkner learnt that, as centre forward, it will not always be so easy as during his mid-week romp against Ruislip Manor. Keith Samuels also made a false start to his comeback after a prolonged injury lay off.

The waste of Horseman was accentuated more than anything in Wycombe's failure to follow through their attacks. Maidstone's saviour, goalkeeper Trice, produced leaps and somersaults in defence of his net, but was prone to gather the ball at a second attempt. Yet, with Horseman lying deep, no opportunist lurked close enough to intervene.

Wanderers intended to dazzle Maidstone with speed, but ironically accelerated the pace to such an extent that they themselves tended to lose control of play. Thus, handed a fighting chance to fend off Wycombe's careless approach work, Maidstone were reprieved from a first half pounding.

Constant runners, if little else, United broke their defensive shackles at irregular, sparse intervals, and yet it was they who scored first. A sudden dash upfield, a through ball which the home defence paced but forgot to cover, and Hanley nipped in to slip a 19th minute goal past Maskell to contradict the run of events.

Only then did Wanderers

...and drop a place in the title race

ISTHMIAN LEAGUE

	P.	Pts.
Enfield	19	31
Sutton Utd.	19	27
Hitchin	17	27
Wycombe W.	19	26

Receiving a short corner, Les Merrick edged Wycombe ahead for a first and last time when, positioned to the left of the Maidstone net, he shot acutely into the "box" where Trice punched the ball inside trying to clear.

Whether by pure frustration or a long overdue tactical repositioning, Horseman finally ventured into the front line — and went near to furthering Wycombe's cause within seconds. Once more however, referee Hall had no hesitation in whistling for offside.

Faulkner and company looked refreshed by Horseman's presence and quickly scared Maidstone twice more. Suddenly Wanderers moved like the championship chasers they aspire to be, but their rush of blood was short lived.

Osborne seemed set to pull

Maidstone back on terms five minutes later when tripped by the burly Ian Rundle. Mr. Hall judged the misdemeanour to have occurred just outside the area and the Loakes Park horde gave out with a huge sigh of relief, comparable only to that of utter despair when, seconds later, Angel curled the free kick over Wycombe's "wall".

Wanderers had had their last transfusion and openly panicked, realising too late that roles had reversed.

Gaining confidence and determination with every passing action, United performed the coup de grace in the 71st minute. John Maskell swayed indecisively on his line instead of advancing to intercept as McAllister sent the ball back into the goalmouth and Long burst through to unleash the winner.

TONY HORSEMAN . . . tactical suicide?

Wycombe Wanderers: J. Maskell; D. Thomas, C. Gale; J. Lailey, I. Rundle, A. Horseman; L. Worley, B. Baker, V. Faulkner, K. Samuels, L. Merrick.

Maidstone United: M. Trice; D. McAllister, R. Evans; R. Wladyslaw, G. Riddy, P. Denham; R. McGibbon, M. Angel, P. Long, R. Hanley, G. Osborne.

Referee: Mr. T. R. Hall (Hatfield).

Half-time: 1-1.

Goals timetable: Wycombe; Faulkner (20), Merrick (54). Maidstone: Hanley (19), Angel (59), Long (71).



Only then did Wanderers fulfil their promise by scoring. Sixty seconds later, Faulkner seized upon a diabolical backpass by a Maidstone defender for a swift equaliser, directing the stray ball to the right.

Keith Samuels netted an "offside" goal after 27 minutes, but Wanderers, still having to jump endless hurdles they were placing in their own path, did not take the lead until nine minutes after the resumption.